



The Beginning of Rome

The epic of Rome is the *Aeneid* of Virgil, the greatest poem in the Latin language. Virgil modeled it on the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. He tried to connect the origins of Rome to events that

followed the fiery destruction of Troy by the Greeks. From about the 200s B.C., the Romans tried to relate the origins of their gods to the Greek myths. As things turned out, most Roman mythology simply became Greek mythology dressed up with Latin names.

The Roman Venus [VEE-nuhs], who watched over the fertility and flourishing of gardens, assumed identification with Aphrodite [af-roh-DIE-tee]. Through her son, the Trojan prince Aeneas [ee-NEE-uhs], she came to have a unique role in the stories the Romans developed to connect their origins with the Greek heroic age.



Venus

Aeneas Finds a New Land

As the Greeks burned and conquered the city of Troy, very few of Troy's citizens escaped. Among those that did was Aeneas, a prince. He, his father, and his son fled to the hills where they gathered with other refugees. Aeneas's wife, Creusa [kree-OO-suh], was killed in the mad rush out of the city, but her spirit came to Aeneas and told him that he was destined to find a new home in Italy, and that his descendants would build a beautiful city and empire that would rule the entire world.

Aeneas led the Trojan refugees to the new land, encountering many difficulties along the way. They built a town on the banks of the Tiber River. In time, his son, Ascanius [as-KAN-ee-uhs], grew up and moved to another town, Alba Longa. It was here that the descendants of Aeneas and Ascanius, the twins Romulus [ROM-yoo-luhs] and Remus [REE-muhs], were born.

Romulus and Remus were found and cared for by a mother wolf when they were babies.



Romulus and Remus and the Dream of Rome

The ancient Romans believed that Romulus and Remus were born of a mortal mother and the war god, Mars [MARZ]. The best-known version

Mars = Ares

of this legend tells of an evil king of Alba Longa who had deposed his brother, the rightful king, killed this king's sons, and forced their sister, Rhea Sylvia [REE-uh SIL-vee-uh], to become a priestess to keep her from having

sons. But Rhea Sylvia was loved by Mars, the War God, who made her his bride, and she gave birth to twin sons, Romulus and Remus.

Rhea Sylvia died when the twins were still babies. Since no one else cared for them, their wicked uncle had them placed in a watertight basket and set them drifting down the Tiber.

Nature was kind to the little fellows. The winds were not too rough, and the sun warmed them. The basket-boat rocked gently like a cradle, or a mother's warm and loving arms. But there was one thing they lacked—milk. Being healthy boy babies, they were soon very hungry.

Father Tiber [TIE-ber], the river god, helped them. He called in all the little feeder streams to empty their waters into his. When the Tiber overflowed his banks, the basket floated up high onto the sands; then the waters drew back.

A mother wolf came prowling along. (The wolf was an animal sacred to Mars.) Seeing the basket, she trotted over and saw the babies sucking their fingers; she heard them wailing with hunger. Poor famished mites! These little human children reminded the mother wolf of her own cubs, who could already stand on their feet, though of course they had four instead of only two. The mother wolf caressed these furless infants with her tongue. Never did she think of eating them! With her paw she rolled them, one by one, out of the basket and over the level ground to her cave. She dragged them inside and put them in the downy nest with her own babies. When the little wolves woke up and drank their mother's milk, Romulus and Remus drank too.

For some time they lived in the cave and played with the cubs, rolling around and wrestling with them. In this way they grew fast and strong. They could walk long before most human babies could. They thrived on wolf's milk.

One day when the mother wolf was away, they toddled to the mouth of the cave and saw the sun and the sky. A shepherd passing by saw them creep out and start to play on the grass. He was a kind man and took them home. He and his wife raised them as their own children. They learned to drink their milk from cups and to wear the little shirts, or tunics, that their new mother made for them. They loved these new parents, but never forgot their



**Mars, the god of war,
was the father of
Romulus and Remus.**

wolf mother. Often they ran back to the cave to see her and play and wrestle and dance with the cubs. The little wolves were their first playmates, their foster brothers and sisters.

They loved the river and waded and swam in it and made sand castles along the shore. One day Romulus said that when he grew up he would build a house beside the Tiber, with many rooms, all of marble, and with wide porches and high columns. His brother, Remus, did not live to grow up. But Romulus in time drove out his wicked uncle from Alba Longa and built his dream house on the banks of the Tiber where the mother wolf had nursed him and his twin. Friends came and built their houses around his. In this way a mighty city was founded, with Romulus, for whom it was named, as first king (supposedly in 753 B.C.). This was the beginning of the long glories of majestic Rome.

Name _____ Date _____

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1. A long narrative poem telling of the origins and ideals of a nation and relating the deeds of a national hero is called an _____.
2. The author of the *Aeneid* is _____.
3. The Greek goddess Aphrodite became the Roman goddess _____. She was the mother of _____, who escaped from Troy.
4. The mother of Romulus and Remus was _____.
5. Their father was _____, the god of _____.
5. The twins were born in the town of _____.
6. When the twins were set adrift in the basket, they were saved by the river god, Father _____, who called in other rivers to float the basket to shore.
7. The mother wolf took the infants to her _____. They drank her _____ along with her own cubs.
8. The year 753 B.C. is the mythical symbolic date for the founding of the city of _____.